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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

26 July 1957

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Discussion of NIE Form and Content with Assistant Secretary Bowie

(DCI was present from Mr. Bowie's fifth point onward,
and other points were summarized for his benefit.
Regular Board members present were: Kent, [redacted]
[redacted] Montague, [redacted] Jackson,
A. Smith, and Bundy, [redacted]
and R. J. Smith.)

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Mr. Bowie led off by making five major points:

a. NIE's placed undue emphasis on precise statements of probability,
with too little on discussion of underlying factors and other aspects.
Particularly where the probabilities were nearly even, the policy maker
might care very little which way the odds lay, so long as both possibilities
were so substantial as to warrant his consideration.

b. On the same line, it would be useful in many cases to discuss
more possibilities, extending, say, to those having a likelihood of 20%
or more, particularly if these were serious for US security. This would
flag situations the policy-makers might overlook, and give a more use-
ful spectrum than concentration on the one or two most likely lines of
development.

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c. Predictive statements in estimates often differed very greatly as between those based on firm or plentiful evidence, on the one hand, and those based almost wholly on judgment factors, at the other extreme. The usefulness of estimates and their credit (at least for predictions of the first type) would be greatly improved if the estimate could show on its face the degree to which predictions were based on evidence.* In the case of predictions of the second type, the policy-maker would (and should) feel somewhat freer to substitute his own judgment for that of the estimate.

d. Estimates should stress more the degree to which US action could affect the predicted lines of development, and what kinds of US action could have impact. Such discussion would enable the policy-maker to distinguish between situations the US could influence, and those it could not, and would suggest to him possible ways of exerting influence.

e. NIE's were not very readable, even on otherwise interesting subjects. The conclusions, in particular, tended to very "de-hydrated" and to lack flavor. By way of specific suggestion, Mr. Bowie wondered if it would not be possible to assign particular sections to groups smaller than the whole, e.g. political sections to State and CIA, military sections

* Ed. Note: Mr. Bowie did not appear to be suggesting that the evidence be set forth in detail. In the later discussion he made a related point about spicing up the text by reference to specific episodes, so perhaps this point c might extend to including a selection of evidence in some cases.

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to the services and CIA, with freedom for the non-drafters to make general points, criticise, and in the end footnote if they chose. A further suggestion was that there be a separate series of papers, in the nature of think-pieces, written by a single person or small groups, that would not be approved by the IAC but simply promulgated (in the manner of Foreign Affairs articles) as worthy of consideration by policy-makers.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Kent started with point d and stressed the danger of intelligence agencies appearing as policy advocates. He pointed to the highly successful procedure now used for "consequences" papers dealing with policy assumptions cleared with policy-makers, and suggested that suggestions from the Policy Planning Staff or other sources would make it much easier for the NIE's to get into questions of the impact of US policy. Mr. Bowie conceded the basic danger and agreed on the usefulness of suggestions of what to consider; he thought, however, that NIE's could go ahead to some extent on their own. DCI concurred and raised the specific case of

25X1 [] as an illustration of a case where the policy-maker crucially needed to know whether he could do anything to avert disaster. There was some discussion of the relative ease of discussing such major lines of policy as granting or withholding aid [] 25X1

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difficult to discuss the impact of information policy or covert action. Mr. Bowie thought that intelligence could get into the potential impact of information policy at least in general terms, and could also discuss such ingredients of the covert picture as the nature of the opposition and potential alternative leadership in cases where we were leary of the existing government and trends.

DCI preferred to the possibility of a personal summary by himself, not necessarily cleared with IAC, and went on to concur in Mr. Bowie's point b. about including a broader range of possibilities, even to "wild ideas." [] agreed and alluded to the Princeton discussion of this point.

Mr. Kent commented, with reference to Mr. Bowie's suggestion, in point e., of allocating drafting responsibility, that this might be doubtful for the military sections. Mr. Bowie made it clear that CIA would be the common denominator for all parts. [] commented that the coordination process was not the only villain, that drafts were sometimes not very punchy even at first. Mr. Bowie turned to the consequences section of the recent "Fourth Country" paper as an example of text that seemed to him unclear and even possibly contradictory, with many of the possibilities of most concern to the policy-maker (e.g., that nuclear weapons would come into the hands of irresponsible governments) not discussed and left out of account in making general statements. [] noted that

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most of this section had been re-written during coordination and hence failed to mesh as it should. Mr. Bundy commented that this related to the "wild ideas" point b., in that the sum of the "wild ideas" in this case added up to a large exception to the central proposition.

Mr. Kent then called attention to the two examples of possible summaries prepared for the Sudan NIE. Mr. Bowie and DCI read these and liked them both, with some preference for the first as more pithy and more policy-related. A sample of short conclusions for the same paper was also read, with general strong feeling that this was less useful than the summaries and in fact was a good example of de-hydration. It was noted that US policy impact was not covered in the summaries, and there was discussion whether the text could not cover, in general terms, the possible effect of US aid programs or of US advice and influence toward solving the Nile waters problem.

Mr. Bowie suggested that the NIE's might be made more readable by reference to specific episodes such as "what the Prime Minister said to Mr. McGillicuddy" about aid or neutralism. He wondered if these could not be set off in separate type-face, or in footnote form; both he and DCI commented that they read footnotes avidly in NIE's and elsewhere.

The meeting concluded with the usual felicitations.

[Redacted Signature Box]

WILLIAM P. BUNDY

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